Helen Farnsworth Mears

Helen Farnsworth Mears was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin on December 21, 1872.

She was the daughter of Mary Farnsworth, who wrote periodicals and newspapers and was one of the first Wisconsin writers to publish a volume of serious verse. Helen was a creative child. At the age of 9, she won a prize for her sculpture of "Head of Apollo" at the county fair. Later, she attended Oshkosh Normal School and set up a studio in the family's woodshed.

In 1892, Helen began to formally study art at the Chicago Art Institute under Lorado Taft, an American sculptor and teacher. She received the commission for a figure to represent her state at the World's Colombian exposition. She sculpted the marble statue, "The Genius of Wisconsin."

In 1894, Mears traveled to New York and became a student at the Art Student League and studied under Augustus Saint-Gaudens. In 1895, Helen Mears and her sister Mary traveled to Europe to work and study thanks to the kindness of a prominent Milwaukee Woman's Club leader, Alice Chapman. Helen served as assistant to Saint-Gaudens who at that time was sculpting in Paris.

Upon her return from Europe she was honored to win, through competition, a commission to sculpt a statue of Frances Willard, the editor and temperance reformer. The marble statue was the first statue of a woman to be placed in Statuary Hall in the National Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Helen Mears died in her studio in New York on February 17, 1916.

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